ISSUE #84: NJIQADDHA, MIKE PHILLIPS, STAFF PICKS, GRAVE ROBBER, 16 ALBUM REVIEWS

HEAVEN'S METAL

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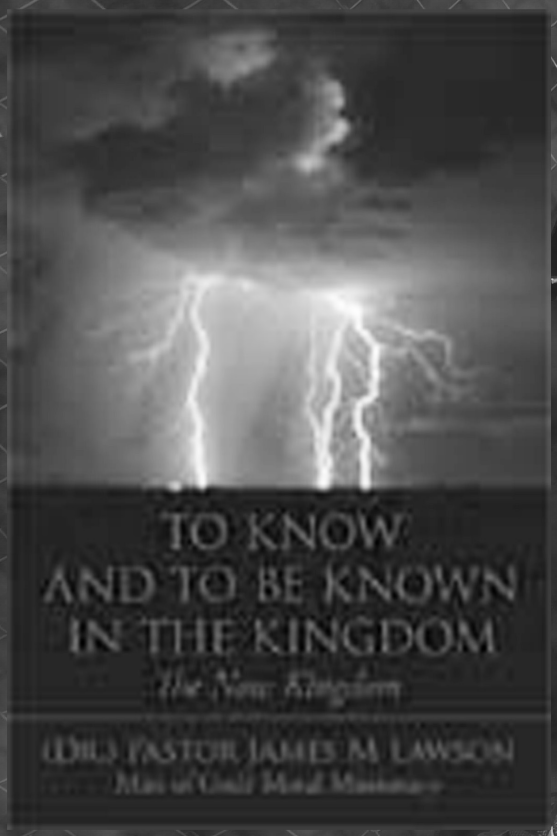

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METAL TRACKS

Hard-news-for-metal-heads

NJIQADDHA

By Chris Gatto

As an artistic and literary community, we pay lip service to innovation and creativity. However, in the music business, it is the bands who "color within the lines" and copy established formats who sell records, while bands who truly break new territory receive initial rejection. True recognition of creative genius doesn't happen until years later, if at all. The American band Njiqaddha embodies much of a pioneering spirit in their music, which is difficult at best to pin down. We might cautiously describe them as a post-black metal band with ambient and industrial noise tendencies. The two band members, known only as - and /, shroud themselves in mystery, while putting out an enormous amount of recorded material in their five-year history. We were given a rare interview to dispel some myths and perhaps clear the mysterious air about this band.

Asked about the secretive nature of the band, we're told that that was the intention from the start. "Who we are and what we do in our daily lives has no impact on the art we create. The goal for Njiqahdda has always been to be as detached from the public aspect of it as possible." This flows right along with the band's reason to exist: " We create simply out of the desire to do so, Njiqahdda is art that is primarily selfish in some respects, mostly because we make music that we want to hear."

These two creative Dr. Frankensteins have logged in an impressive 26 albums as Njiqaddha, not including their other side projects Njiijn, Oaks Of Bethel and Funeral Eclipse. The band is studio in nature mostly by design, because it allows them to create without outside influence to stay within specific timeframes. "We create art as it comes to us without restraint or pressure from any source." So the band's reclusive nature is essential to the integrity of their art. It also helps if you have access to a studio, and these two do, as they run EEE Recordings. Responding to my question about the goals of Nijiqaddha, "(we have) no specific goal other than to create art in multiple mediums that are pleasing to us." We discuss popularity and I am given the distinct inpression that this is the very antithesis of what N. is all about. "So many artists create out of the (un)pure desire to be known and liked by people, which in my mind is kind of sad. If that is what someone wants from their creations, then good for them. This will never be important to us... The fact that we can openly create art that is important and relevant to us as people, is a success on every level as far as we are concerned." They describe their work as "(a continuous) creative energy flowing in one form or another, that begs for us to capture its essence."

[continued online at hmmag.com]

News bullets

Believer studio update: "You haven't heard from us for a while, so we wanted to give you a quick studio update. We've been in writing mode for a couple months and now it's getting to the point where we are starting to piece together some very early 'pre-pre-production recordings.' These are very basic guitar-only tracks recorded to a click, for the purpose of helping Joey to finish writing his drum parts and for all of us to get a very preliminary feel for the album as a whole. So far much of the writing has taken place in various 'small group' sessions containing 2 or 3 members of the band. We tend to set specific goals for each of these sessions. Whether it's coming up with new song ideas, refining ideas that already exist, recording scratch tracks or writing specific parts for specific instruments, we generally have an idea of what we want to accomplish before we get together. This helps us to stay focused on the task at hand and see continual progress. That's it for now … let us know what projects you're working on this year – music-related or otherwise. Thanks for your support!" – Believer

And this exciting news from **Ted Kirkpatrick** (**Tourniquet**): "I have three exciting things to tell you about. I have just completed recording my first solo album called *Ode To A Roadkill*. The title track refers to the sad reality of the millions of animals who die each year on our roadways. 7 songs, over 40 minutes of brand new music. I have been a fan of slow 'stoner' music for many years, and this album definitely fits that category, with my own influence to it, of course. I'm really pleased with the way it turned out and look forward to having you all hear it as it is super, super heavy. All 'vocals' are done utilizing majestic, creepy, haunting, unaltered animal calls. Cool album art designed by Jared Meyer – aka Lucid Hysteria. The album will be available as a 6-panel Digipak CD and an online download. Looking at a release date of March 10, 2010 – right around the corner. At the same time, I have been working on a different solo project also very soon to be released called *In The Shadow of the Masters*. It is a very technical drumming album featuring drums played over classical music. I've done a few things on past Tourniquet albums, but I think this is beyond anything so far just in length of the pieces. I*n The Shadow of the Masters* will feature music by Mozart, Chopin, Rossini, Beethoven and more. Release date: March 30, 2010. Finally, we will be recording a brand new epic Tourniquet album in July or August, 2010. We are excited to announce that we will be working with legendary English producer Neil Kernon. Neil has either produced, recorded, mixed, or engineered a staggering amount of cool music from classic metal (Queensryche, Dokken, Judas Priest, Autograph) to death metal (Nile, Cannibal Corpse) to progressive music (Nevermore, Magma) to hair metal (Britny Fox) to Christian bands like Petra, to classic bands like Kansas, to platinum selling albums like Hall and Oates Private Eyes. We plan to release it as soon as it's finished in fall of this year." [tourniquet.bandcamp.com]

Crystavox and Roxx Records are very proud to reveal the full release details and new cover art for their brand new Limited Edition release *The Twenty Year Mix*. This two disc set is scheduled to be released May 25th, 2010 and will consist of both a full length CD and a very special DVD release.

HEAVEN'S METAL KAREW: Staff Picks 2009

Top 10 Consensus List

1. Impellitteri – *Wicked Maiden*
(Rob and Chris reunite to deliver a scorching melodic metal gem)
2. Stryper – *Murder By Pride*
(triumphant return to what makes these rockers so vital)
3. (tie) A Hill To Die Upon – *Infinite Titanic Immortal*
(Cook brothers' stellar debut of bludgeoning conceptual death metal)
Grave Robber – *Inner Sanctum*
(Misfits influenced horror punk that's "all the rage")
5. Believer – *Gabriel*
(impressive comeback of tech/prog – almost industrial – metal)
6. Dagon – *Terraphobic*
(NWOAHM band branded "Ocean metal" – sailors beware!)
7. (tie) Maylene & The Sons of Disaster – *III*
(consistently great, this is arguably their best yet)
Seventh Angel – *The Dust of Years*
(polarizing release to be sure; heavy and doomy nevertheless)
9. (tie) Main Line Riders – *Worldshaker*
(Cliffy's world class rock 'n' roll)
Narnia – *Course of a Generation*
(surprisingly refreshing – new singer German Pascual delivers!)

Honorable Mentions
In Grief – *Deserted Soul*
(bombastic Scandinavian melodic death metal – a band to watch for sure!)
Shadow Gallery – *Digital Ghosts*
(classic prog metal excellence with new Geoff Tate-like vocals)

Chris Beck
1. Impellitteri – *Wicked Maiden*
2. Rob Rock – *Progpower USA 2008 DVD*
3. Stryper – *Murder by Pride*
4. Divine Symphony – *The History*
5. Mastedon – *3*

Chris Gatto
1. A Hill to Die Upon – *Infinite Titanic Immortal*
2. Impellitteri – *Wicked Maiden*
3. Thresher – *Here I Am*
4. Believer – *Gabriel*
5. Dagon – *Terraphobic*

Loyd Harp
1. A Hill to Die Upon – *Infinite Titanic Immortal*
2. Earth from Above – *Numbered with the Trangressors*
3. Swine Suicide – *Visions of the Crucifixion* (demo)
4. Seventh Angel – *The Dust of Years*
5. Dagon – *Terraphobic*

Mark Blair Glunt
1. VIP – *Maasta Olet Tullut*
2. HB – *Frozen Inside*
3. Ajalon – *This Good Place*
4. Vertical Alignment – *Lost In Space*
5. Fred Schendel – *The Ten Toes of Turl*

Michael Larson
1. Main Line Riders – *Worldshaker*
2. Believer – *Gabriel*
3. Dagon – *Terraphobic*
4. Grave Robber – *Inner Sanctum*
5. A Hill To Die Upon – *Infinite Titanic Immortal*

Jeff McCormack
1. Impellitteri – *Wicked Maiden*
2. Stryper – *Murder By Pride*
3. Narnia – *Course of a Generation*
4. Reinxeed – *Higher*
5. Neal Morse – *So Many Roads*

Keven Crothers
1. Grave Robber – *Inner Sanctum*
2. Orphan Project – *Spooning Out The Sea*
3. Ultimatum – *Lex Metallis*
4. Stryper – *Murder By Pride*
5. Main Line Riders – *Worldshaker*

Jonathan Swank
1. Shadow Gallery – *Digital Ghosts*
2. Impellitteri – *Wicked Maiden*
3. Maylene & The Sons of Disaster – *III*
4. Narnia – *Course of a Generation*
5. Creed – *Full Circle*

Doug Van Pelt
1. Flyleaf – *Momento Mori*
2. Austrian Death Machine – *Double Brutal*
3. Maylene & The Sons Of Disaster – *III*
4. August Burns Red – *Constellations*
5. Dalit – *S/T*

The Swedish melodic metal band **Audiovision** will release their second album *Focus* in Europe and North America on April 23rd through Ulterium Records. The album was produced and mixed by Erik Mårtensson (W.E.T., Eclipse) and mastered by Micke Lind (Dio, Candlemass, Talisman). *Focus* is a high quality melodic metal release influenced by bands like Whitesnake, Dio, Rainbow, Europe, Gotthard and Stryper, and fans of the genre won't be disappointed! Track listing: 1. "Invitation" 2. "Keep the Fire Burning" 3. "We are Not Alone" 4. "The Son Will Come" 5. "You are the Reason" 6. "Fruit of love" 7. "We Will Go" 8. "I Will Belong to You" 9. "The Way" 10. "The Gate" 11. "Focus." The official release party for *Focus* will be held at The Cave Rock Club in Sundbyberg, Sweden on April 24th together with the bands House of Shakira and Mercury Fang.

The line-up of Audiovision:
Christian Liljegren [Divinefire, ex. Narnia] - Vocals
Simeon Liljegren [Ex. Modest Attraction] - Bass & Vocals
Torbjörn Weinesjö [Veni Domine] - Guitars & Vocals
Thomas Weinesjö [Veni Domine, Saviour Machine] - Drums
Olov Andersson [Grand Stand] - Keyboards & Vocals

Head over to the bands official myspace profile to check out the entire opening track "Invitation" as well as some samples from the album. [myspace.com/audiovisionsweden]

The recording of **Jerusalem**'s new album is going forward and they will start mixing it in March, 2010. Look for a release later this year. [jerusalem.se]

The UK based ice-cold legion **Wintersoul** are proud to announce that they have just signed a deal with American record label Nokternal Hemizphear [nhmetal.com]. A new era has begun and we are confident that the cooperation will be successful for both band and record label. More detailed information on the debut album, including the official release date, cover art revealing, and track streaming will be announced shortly. [myspace.com/wintersouldhorde]

Raging Storm Records to re-launch Sancrosanct Records under new ownership. Raging Storm and Sancrosanct Records have officially split into two labels. They are assembling a new staff of talented and experienced individuals to gear up for the summer touring season and beyond. As part of the split, Raging Storm (the former parent company who created Sancrosanct Records in 2007) is going to bring in breaking new artists in metal and other genres, making for a more musically diverse catalog of music. Look for both labels to continue to work together at this year's Cornerstone festival and beyond, while each group further develops their own rosters.

This message from **Dale Thompson** (**Bride**): "Over the course of the past year, many things have changed in my life. I recorded my last Bride CD and sort of hoped that after I announced retirement from music some big label or producer would come along and encourage me to do more music, but that did not happen. So I started writing on a book based on the Codex Gigas. Feel free to check out the book that I am basing my writing on and its history at: historyphilosophybooks.suite101.com/article.cfm/the_codex_gigas.

Iona will be playing a rare US concert in Denver, CO on June 20, with **Dave Beegle** opening.

Creed released a video for their new song, "A Thousand Faces."

Check out what Roxx Records has in the pipeline…

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and 'Sceptre' Demos
w/ Pre-orders Only!
Release: 06/22/10

The **Moshketeers**
The Downward Spiral
PLUS Bonus Disc
Rapture 'Vacation
from Hell' DEMO!
w/ Pre-Orders ONLY!
Release: 07/13/10

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'D' tracks! And many
favorite 'D' songs covered
by Way to Many to list!
Release: 08/24/10

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Sacred Warrior
Hard Rock Café – San Juan, Puerto Rico, Fri, Dec. 4, 2009

Sacred Warrior with the original members Rey Parra (vocals), Bruce Swift (guitar), Steve Watkins (bass) and Tony Velasquez (drums) and the recent keyboard player Joe Petit visits for the first time to the Island of the Captivation (known in Spanish as "Isla del Encanto"). To the delight of their "Fans Boricuas," a very good concert before a scanty concurrence. But the present public has enjoyed very much in this occasion. They began their concert with a piece of a Christmas song, "Oh Emmanuel," then when Rey Parra said, "It's Christmas Time," and said in Spanish: "¡Felíz Navidad!"

Followed by the songs: "No Happy Endings," "Children of the Light," "Remember Me," "He Died," "Rebellion," "Fire From Heaven," "Temples on Fire," "War Torn Hero," "The Flood," "Holy Holy Holy," "Warriors" and some new song from a new CD coming out in 2010. Bruce Swift (guitar player) took a part for ministry of the Word of God for the lives in there. Of course, it was more than a great concert (but), a great experience. The group has demonstrated that, after 23 years, they continue giving the maximum since doing it from its formation. And this way it was.

That was a VERY GREAT TIME! Indeed, it deserves to be repeated very soon in Puerto Rico. That would be Super...
–Edwin López [www.myspace.com/edwinlopez777]

See more photos at hmmag.com

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ANTIDEMON

Travelling Musicianaries

BY MICHAEL LARSON

I HAVE TO ADMIT I HAVE BEEN INTRIGUED WITH ANTIDEMON FOR QUITE SOME TIME. THEY PLAY EXTREME METAL FOR JESUS AND SEE MUCH FRUIT. THEY JUST PUT OUT A NEW ALBUM CALLED *SATANICHAOS,* WHICH IS EXTREMELY HEAVY AND HAVE BEEN TOURING THROUGHOUT THE WORLD. THROUGH MODERN TECHNOLOGY AND THE HELP OF A TRANSLATOR, I WAS ABLE TO ASK BATISTA A FEW QUESTIONS ABOUT ANTIDEMON.

ML: I notice you have been working hard on getting out and playing live in various places. How were you received on your recent tour dates thru Europe?
Batista: We're on a world tour. We started in Bolivia, after that Mexico, and then to Europe where we've done everything from big festivals to small shows. We started in Germany, Switzerland, Italy, after that Portugal and Spain, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Denmark, and finally at the Destruction Fest in England and the Nordic Fest in Norway. We were well received at all of these dates and the acceptance of our new album *Satanichaos* was also a surprise. What's most important to us are the various testimonies we've acquired on this tour. Many people have surrendered to Jesus Christ during our shows, there were many manifestations of the power of God and we saw people being transformed in countries so far away. We're very happy that God has chosen us for this mission.

Did you see the Lord move during your playing out live? Would you care to share a bit of that?
We were playing in a city called Remscheid in Germany and after a few songs we felt that we had to make the invitation to those who still didn't have Jesus Christ in their hearts and desired this to raise their hands and come closer to the stage. Some youngsters with a lot of attitude did this and at this same moment another one came from the back of the room and joined the others. After the show he introduced himself and told us that during the whole show he felt a demonic force that didn't allow him to enter the place but he kept listening from outside and even though he wanted to enter he couldn't. But at the moment we were preaching and inviting people to surrender to Jesus he got enough strength to enter. He was really very happy and touched by what he was feeling because he was relieved of many burdens. We've recently received an email from him where he said that he has been happy with Jesus since that day and that his life has been made all the better.

I have heard that you are quite involved with the local church in South America. How are you involved?
My wife Juliana and I are leaders of a church in Brazil called "Crash Church" that is in 3 cities. Our headquarters is in Sao Paulo and there are two other churches in Sao Vicente and Brasilia. It is a church with a very evangelistic approach, looking to reach out to those in the underground scene. Other than Antidemon, there are bands of various musical styles and in this way we have evangelized frequently through shows. We also work with theater and social action providing spiritual assistance, food and clothing to underprivileged people. Our churches don't look like churches in a conventional sense … as we're trying to create an environment that would be attractive to those who like a more underground style. The walls are all painted black but have drawings that show our conviction and commitment to Jesus Christ. We are really involved with the church and this together with Antidemon takes up every moment of our lives.

Has the Lord used Antidemon as you work with the church?
Antidemon is strongly tied to the church and even when we are only working with the church, people go because they know that we are members of this band and also

because of its testimonies, they want to be with us. Antidemon has done shows in churches and this has borne fruit, people who convert to Jesus and are baptized in churches and others that also go because they know the band end up staying with the church and become active members. The presence and connection of the band with the church has been beneficial and this ministry through means of communication such as magazines, newspapers, radio and TV has made many people get to know and get closer to our church "Crash Church" … or in other words the Church blesses Antidemon and Antidemon blesses the church.

What advice do you have for those who feel that God has called them to minister through metal music?
When God calls someone to minister through metal music, it is really something great and honorable; however, there is much responsibility, because it is a call to reach lives that most of the time cannot be reached by conventional ministries and churches. It is necessary that the person who senses this calling be ready for deep preparation for this mission. You need to know that it is not only musical! The chosen person, as well as the metal music, are only instruments that are used by God's hands. Normally, musicians like the applause, the spotlight and recognition a lot ... and sometimes expect to have all of this through metal music! This is a big mistake because the musician can become greatly frustrated, in this calling the applause go to Jesus ... the spotlight is on Him, and the honor and the glory is for Him! Those who are called can expect to only be instruments. In this way pride will never destroy the conquests acquired! We must remember what happened to Lucifer, who was a minister of music in heaven and was destroyed because he thought he was more than an instrument; pride took him over and the result was the chaos of his existence.

How has *Satanichaos* been received by fans so far?
The album has been a great blessing for Antidemon! We have been surprised that at every show a lot of people sing along with us on the new songs and at the same time, where it has been that CD sales are less due to Internet piracy and downloads, sales of our CD have been incredible. We are very happy with it and this makes us want to record another as soon as possible. We're sure that it won't be long before we do so.

How do you feel about the final outcome of the album?
We feel as if we've grown a lot musically. But it's inevitable that even with things that you like doing that when you are finished recording you have that feeling that a load of things could have been done better. That's what makes a band record the following album better. Recording an album is a real learning experience and we'd really like to record the next album.

Current plans for Antidemon? Any chance of seeing you in America this year?
After Europe we have a South American tour with 7 shows in Venezuela and 2 in Colombia. We are praying a lot for 2010, and one of the motives for praying has been for a tour of America. It's always been a dream for us to do America and we believe that God can open the doors to this country that we love so much, and we've received many messages and emails from people who want to see us playing on North American soil and who admire our work. We have to also pray for and decide on another European tour as doors and invitations for 2010 are already opening. All in all, we know that God will continue to take us all over this planet and this has been a mission for us and we're open to this.

GRAVE ROBBER

The House on Haunted Hill

BY KEVEN CROTHERS

ONCE WRETCHED, THE LEAD VOCALIST FOR GRAVE ROBBER, AGREED TO DO AN INTERVIEW FOR HEAVEN'S METAL I WAS VERY EXCITED. THEIR LATEST ALBUM INNER SANCTUM WAS MY FAVORITE ALBUM OF 2009. LYRICALLY ORIGINAL AND CATCHY METAL PUNK ALA THE MISFITS, INNER SANCTUM HAS A MAGIC ALL ITS OWN. GRAVE ROBBER PRODUCED THE SINGLE AND ACCOMPANYING VIDEO FOR THE SONG "ALTERED STATES," "WITCH" IS JUST SUPER.

When Wretched said, as a precondition, that I had to come to his home for the interview my first thought was, "cool." Yet the laugh on the other end of the phone left me a little nervous. Would I be safe? No one wants to do an interview with a corpse per se, but they had seen the Re-Animator so I was thinking it would be fine. However, the hair on the back of my neck didn't think so.

Upon arriving at Wretched's home, I was left wondering about this whole adventure. A dilapidated old mansion was not really what I had in mind. The rusty gate, overgrown front yard, peeling paint and banging shutters produced a lump in my throat the size of Mt. Rushmore. The overcast sky and strong wind didn't help my disposition either.

Knocking at the door I was greeted by Wretched, who said in his gurgling voice, "Please come in." I entered and he ushered me to the parlor.

"Please excuse the cobwebs – my pets do have a tendency to overrun the place."

Yeah, "no problem" I was thinking to myself. The interior reminded me of some old Vincent Price film, Victorian era and all. Wonderful.

"Would you care for some tea?"

Trying to be agreeable I said, "Thank you very much." I answered really wanting to get down to cases and get out of that place.

Origin Story...

Wretched began by telling me about the beginning of these grave robbing madmen. "Grave Robber began in 2005 – after two years of prayer – as a 'side project.' [Corpses pray?] We went through several lineup changes pretty quick due to low commitment levels musically and low commitment levels to God."

I started to wonder if the former members were buried in the back yard. I had seen several lumps of earth that indeed looked fresh, yet I tried not to think about such things. My mind seemed to be playing tricks on me or so it seemed because of the low light and red gauze which surrounded the room. It didn't help that the floor creaked every time I shifted my weight in the chair I was sitting in.

Wretched seemed to catch my apprehension and said, "Nervous?" with a low cackle. He continued, "We finally settled on this lineup, which has been the highest talent level and most stable since 2008." Most stable? Is he discussing a mental condition? I could feel the sweat on my palms start to grow.

"Carcass and I were sitting in church one night [corpses go to church at night, of course] and the message was on Romans 6. So we were like, 'great, we're dead guys!'"

I kept thinking, "Hmm, corpses are usually dead. Am I missing something?"

With a red glint in his eye Wretched went on to explain, "Immediately following, we ate some flesh and drank some blood … er, I mean we took communion and we were like, 'Ok, we're dead guys who symbolically eat flesh and drink blood. Nice! WE ARE ZOMBIES!!'" Wretched took a breath after letting out a low laugh. Undoubtedly because of the shudder that went through my body upon hearing the term "zombie."

Perhaps a nod to the song from their first album Be Afraid. Yet I must wonder how can the Gospel be put forth in such terms? I mean zombies in Church? What about all of the horror type elements? I thought I might've stumped Wretched at this point. After all,

doesn't this hinder the message being put forth to the audience?

After balancing his chin on a long boney finger he sat forward in his chair and answered. "Not at all!! Our audience gets it. We aren't necessarily speaking primarily to believers. Don't get me wrong, we are unfathomably thankful for every Christian brother and sister who supports and encourages Grave Robber; it's just that our foremost goal is to reach a dead and dying, hurting scene – to bring a message of hope to some people who either have never heard or at very least don't think it's for them. We present the Gospel the same way Paul did in Athens, but using the art, poetry and language of our target audience."

At this point, another masked figure came in and offered us more tea and then added another log to the fireplace in the corner. As we discussed the new album, Inner Sanctum, Wretched made this observation: "With a better lineup of musicians, we were able to implement some stronger rhythms, leads and general timing that wasn't present before. I mean, I still love *Be Afraid*, but *Inner Sanctum* was just a natural progression. We grew a bit as song writers. There is more of a metal element on the new disc which I myself really like, but looking at Be Afraid there is definitely a lot going on there as well. Of particular note on the collector's edition is a re-mix of the song 'Rigor Mortis,' done by Angel from the band Dope. We played a show with Dope in 2007 and I gave Angel a 'demo version' of Be Afraid. He contacted me and asked if I'd be interested in a re-mix of one of our songs. As it turns out, both Angel and I had, at different times, played in ex-Misfit Bobby Steele's band, The Undead."

As our time was drawing to a close there were a couple of loose ends that I thought needed to be tied up (not my hands, however…) Fans may know that Grave Robber released a comic book and did a DVD shoot. Wretched commented on both. "Originally, there were supposed to be 12 issues. Issue number 1 did quite well. Not long after issue number one, John Parker of Post Mortem did a disappearing act and well … we are now working on releasing a comic book on our own! In regards to the DVD, we are still waiting to see that footage! Ha Ha!" My blood was running cold at this point because I did notice two open graves along the side of the mansion upon arrival.

As I started to make a move to the door, the perspiration was running down my back with the thought of what could be in my future by staying any longer. With that, Wretched had these final thoughts: "We are currently talking to a new record label and gearing up the writing process, to be ready if the deal goes through. We are gonna call the new disc *You're All Gonna Die.* Even if the deal doesn't go through, expect some new songs in our live set over the next couple of months!"

At this point, I start running down the hallway with Wretched following me speaking in low guttural tones, "Our most immediate goal right now is building our fan base through touring and our social networks. We currently have a MySpace (myspace.com/graverobberpunk), Facebook (Grave Robber), Twitter (GraveRobberPunk) and a Reverbnation site (reverbnation.com/graverobberpunk). We want EVERYONE to find us and become part of the Grave Robber family!"

With that, I reached my car and jumped in. Wretched was still at the door of the mansion laughing as I drove away listening to their cover of Black Sabbath's "Children of the Grave." Indeed! [*Inner Sanctum* is available on Retroactive Records.]

Looking in the Mirror with... MIKE PHILLIPS

BY CHRIS BECK

MIKE PHILLIPS IS DEFINITELY WHAT ONE WOULD CALL A VETERAN OF THE CHRISTIAN HEAVY METAL INDUSTRY. HAVING RECORDED AND TOURED WITH BANDS SUCH AS DELIVERANCE AND FASEDOWN OVER THE YEARS, HE JUMPED AT THE CHANCE TO RELEASE A SOLO ALBUM THROUGH THE COLLABORATION OF ROXX RECORDS AND OPEN GRAVE RECORDS. THE RESULT IS AN ECLECTIC AND INTROSPECTIVE MUSICAL AND LYRICAL JOURNEY. WE RECENTLY SPOKE TO MIKE ABOUT THE EXPERIENCE OF RECORDING HIS FIRST SOLO ALBUM.

Chris Beck: What was the inspiration for your new album, *Mirrors Within Mirrors*?
Mike Phillips: It dates back a while. For most of my music career, I've put time into various bands that I was in; however, getting four or five people on the same page musically isn't always easy. While I always give 100% into anything I'm involved with, there are compromises in songwriting, which isn't necessarily a bad thing, but my heart is with progressive music. The songs I like most tend to be pretty long, like old Rush, Pink Floyd, Dream Theater and Neal Morse. So, I finally decided to do a solo recording, without trying to sound a certain way or limited to one genre – just writing from the heart.

How did the album come together? Specifically, how did you arrange for all the guest musicians to participate in this project?
Most of the musicians on this album are very good friends of mine, so lining them up was easy. Everything was recorded in my studio except for Scott Waters and Bill Bachman. I flew in Jimmy Brown to lay the vocal tracks on "Nails and Tears." Drummer Jim Chaffin happens to work for the company that my wife and I own. We also attend the same church. He helped me quite a bit with drums – we spent a lot of time mapping out parts together. Scott Waters recorded vocal tracks in his hometown of Albuquerque and we sent electronic files back and forth. The Crucified was rehearsing for their summer show dates at my studio, so I asked Mark Solomon to do a few vocals. Devin Shaeffer lives down the street and vocalist Scott Wallace also goes to my church, Calvary Chapel Fresno. I was originally going to record all the bass tracks myself, but I really wanted my long-time friend and amazing bassist, Tim Kronyak, on this album. Drummer Matt Davis (Oh, Sleeper) is from Fresno and he and I became friends when Deliverance needed a fill-in drummer. Matt is probably the most gifted musician I have ever played with. Drummer Bill Bachman was a last minute addition. Being a huge Neal Morse fan, the opportunity to have his drummer play on my album was extremely cool. The vocalists on "I Will Praise Him Still" were lined up by another friend from church, Sarah Carter.

You really open up to the listener on "Secret Games" and "The Darkest Hour," which are part of the song "Mirrors Within Mirrors Part 2." What message would you like people to take from *Mirrors Within Mirrors*?
I wanted to share what I went through before and after I became a Christian and be as open and honest as possible. It's the only way I sleep at night. "The Darkest Hour" is probably the most intense movement on the album. When I was around 19 years old I got into cocaine and would do as much as I could on payday, usually staying up

Mike with Bill (Roxx) and James (Open Grave)

all night. That song is about a near overdose I had. Praise God I got out of that life! I got saved and the last time I touched cocaine was in 1990. "Secret Games" is the battle we all face as Christians, when we try to hide sin in our lives. The Bible says to confess our sins and He will forgive us. Why hold on to these burdens of sin? I'm slowly learning this, but there is fruit. Every year I give Him more and more control of my life, and I feel so free.

What song on *Mirrors Within Mirrors* means the most to you and why?
Probably the Mirrors songs, because it's the closest thing I've ever written to what I really like. The movements have feel and some parts are extremely difficult to execute. Sometimes I would spend three or four hours on one 30 second lead riff, not only to make sure the technical playing was right but that the feel and execution was right. If you listen in particular to the leads on this recording, you will hear a melody within the song. The leads are like vocal tracks, and the lyrics tell about the Lord and my life, so I would say the Mirrors tracks are the crown jewel of this recording.

Looking back on your time spent with Deliverance and Fasedown, how do view this time in your life and the impact the bands had?
As far as Deliverance, I joined the band in 1992 during their peak. The "Weapons of Our Warfare" video was on *Headbanger's Ball* a lot, shows all across the country were packed, and it was the perfect gig for me. At the time, I had been saved for about two years and wanted to play in a Christian band. In Deliverance I was able to minister to kids before and after shows and focus on being a lead guitarist, which is my passion. I was into technical thrash and wanted to progress in that direction, but Jimmy was somewhat burned out on thrash and wanted to progress in a different direction. We recorded *Stay of Execution* and the *Intense Live Series* albums and I then decided to leave the band. A few years later, in 1997, I decided to try something different, so I tuned my guitar down and started writing heavy groove riffs. I showed Jim Chaffin what I was writing and he really liked it. We met Devin Shaeffer and Fasedown just blossomed from there. Later, Jimmy and I reconnected to do some Deliverance reunion shows in 2006. After talking quite a bit, we decided to do a Deliverance record together…*As Above – So Below*. I love that record. Now, Fasedown is together again. We talked and prayed and decided to try it again. It's been a lot of fun. We will be playing live in 2010, possibly even in Europe. The lineup is me, Devin, Jim and newcomers Gary Douglas (guitar) and Tim Kronyak (bass).

What final message or words of encouragement would you like to leave with the readers of *Heaven's Metal*?
I would say to believers to hold strong to your faith. There are many temptations, distractions and compromises. The Bible talks about the fruits of the spirit; one of them is self control. It seems nowadays we are all victims and our problems are the fault of everyone else. When we fail, we should confess our sins and be genuinely sorry for it. You cannot fool God. I pray we would all hate sin. We need to stand firm in Christ, be involved in His work wherever you are, and remember what His own disciples said, "Lord, where else shall we go?" There is no other answer, there is no other hope.

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ALBUM REVIEWS

SHADOW GALLERY
DIGITAL GHOSTS
Without a doubt, this is a special release for fans of the band, as well as fans of progressive metal/rock in general. For those who have followed these guys since their debut release in 1992, you already know that Shadow Gallery delivers a melodic heavy rock/metal that is well-crafted, thought-provoking and progressively tinged – the *Tyranny/Room V* series now classics within the genre. If so, then you also know that original singer Mike Baker died last fall from a heart attack. Instead of calling it quits, SG decided to carry on, adding new singer Brian Ashland (who amazingly sounds like Geoff Tate). With the help of Brian and a few friends – vocalists Clay Barton and Ralph Scheepers (Primal Fear) – the musically genius trio of Gary Wehrkamp (also Amaran's Plight), Carl Cadden-James and Brendt Allman have released – in tribute to Baker – yet another excellent collection of diverse and complex songs. And after several spins, these songs dig their hooks in and never let go – the layered melodic vocal choruses so trademark Shadow Gallery ever present in the mix. Imagine *Empire*-era Queensryche mixed with the classic prog sounds of Genesis, Kansas and Yes. At times, the vocal sections even remind me of Queen; the Brian May like guitar solo on "Haunted" heavily influenced by the same. Unfortunately, long time drummer, Joe Nevolo, only appears on two tracks ("Venom" and "Gold Dust"), but Gary Wehrkamp – multi-instrumentalist and song writer extraordinaire – does a really good job filling in on the other songs. Lyrically, SG is always strong, but this is definitely their most spiritual release to date. While I may have been skeptical upon first listen – so hard to endure line-up changes with our favorite bands – repeated listens have allayed my fears. Shadow Gallery has once again delivered a great slab of progressive, melodic rock/metal. What a blessing it would be if these guys ever put on a live show. [Inside Out] Jonathan Swank

MIKE PHILLIPS
MIRRORS WITHIN MIRRORS
Deliverance guitarist steps out on his own … sort of. Featuring familiar guest vocal appearances by Mark Soloman (Crucified), Devin Schaeffer (Once Dead), Jimmy Brown (Deliverance), Scott Waters (Ultimatum) and a host of instrumental guests, this album contains a mix of instrumental and vocal tracks. Overall this release is a mix of metal, thrash, acoustic and even a praise all interwoven into a tapestry of diversity, making for a musical journey worth experiencing again and again. [Roxx] Jeff McCormack

MASTEDON
3
Almost 20 years after the release of *Lofcaudio*, Mastedon returns with a new album that has strong resemblances to John Elefante's solo work and to the music of his other former band, Kansas. Best described as melodic rock with progressive elements, if you were looking for music with an edge and multiple singers ala *It's a Jungle Out There*, then this album isn't it. If, however, you enjoy exquisite singing and melodies along with near-perfect production and huge background vocals, then 3 is the album for you. [Frontiers] Chris Beck
Doc – This release is also available in North America for mp3 download under the title John Elefante and Mastedon – Revolution of Mind.

MASTEDON
IT'S A JUNGLE OUT THERE
Frontiers records (Italy), in conjunction with the European release of the new Mastedon (see review above), has reissued this classic from John Elefante and friends. Fans of lush, melodic 80's rock will be excited to see this rare (previously extinct) Mastedon debut see the light of day again. Three bonus tracks have been included – 2 live tracks from Cornerstone '91 and "Wasn't It Love" from 1987's *California Metal* – but no expanded liner notes. Less progressive than John's work with Kansas, these songs still exuded a professional quality that was much celebrated (and appreciated) back in the days of the early Christian rock and metal movement. Available in North America through impulsemusic.com or cdinzane.com. [Frontiers] Jonathan Swank

MEHIDA
THE EMINENT STORM
When considering that Mehida includes former members of accomplished bands such as Sonata Arctica and Candlemass and that vocals are handled by Thomas Vikstrom, who also sings on the very good 7 Days album The Weight of the World, The Eminent Storm is a disappointment. The music lacks cohesion, the production has no punch and overall, the songs just aren't that good. Several bands could take writing lessons from these heartfelt lyrics, but unfortunately, that isn't enough to save this album. [Bullroser] Chris Beck

ROB ROCK
LIVE IN ATLANTA - PROGPOWER USA 9 DVD
Both the audio and video quality from this 2008 Progpower USA concert are excellent, and despite minimal rehearsing, the band seems to be hitting on all cylinders. The dual-guitar attack achieves an enviable balance of calculated crunch and spontaneous soloing, while Rob's voice sounds strong and hits all the high notes. The only complaint is too few bonus features – an interview or backstage footage would have been nice additions. Overall, however, this DVD is very enjoyable and an absolute must for all Rob Rock fans. [AFM] Chris Beck

TRANSATLANTIC
THE WHIRLWIND
The enormity of talent this renowned super group (Morse, Portnoy, Stolt, Trawavas) possess is undisputed, but with these two hours of music there is absolutely nothing that hasn't been done before in some form or another. In my opinion, this sounds too much like another Neal Morse solo disc. Even the lyrics this time are in line with Neal's solo work, which is not to be dismissed because Neal's faith has come to the forefront of everything he does musically now. Still, while the band's chops are amazing – especially on "Is It Really Happening?" – it would have been nice to hear a unique musical approach this time around. The concept here is a good one; the entire first disc encompasses the title track. Unfortunately, this makes the bonus disc – which isn't really a bonus disc given the price of this release – feel superfluous. Most of the songs (on disc 2) are cover tunes (America, Genesis, The Beatles and Santana). Fans of "over the top" prog rock will enjoy this for sure, but don't expect anything new. [Radiant/Metal Blade] Jonathan Swank

SCOURGED FLESH
WELCOME TO THE END OF THE WORLD
With an album cover that recalls the 1990 Sacrament debut *Testimony of the Apocalypse*, and a sound that, is being touted as death metal, I'm hearing more thrash than death, with slow but thrashy chunky rhythms. There are some nice dual guitar leads and the band hasn't lost

retroactiverecords.net, opengraverecords.com, nhmetal.com, myspace.com/robjohnsonmusic

its penchant for melodic soloing, particularly on "Shadow Storm." While definitely not as brutal as some deathheads might hope for, this is a solid release nonetheless. [Soundmass] Loyd Harp

JACOBS DREAM
BENEATH THE SHADOWS
Jacobs Dream's 5th studio release in a decade is an epic power metal concept story which is wonderfully conceived and well executed–nicely chronicling the physical and spiritual consequences of a life of addiction and self centeredness. Singer Chaz Bond stands out here (especially on the remorseful ballad "The Darkest Hour") but once again the guitar riffs and melodies courtesy Noble and Berry define the JD sound – this time around the tempos feel just a bit slower. I have been a long term advocate of these guys – their debut, along with Drama of the Ages, still very special releases for me – but there is something about the mixing quality on this (and their last release for that matter) that is not up to par. Still, for those of you that miss Wicked Generation era Sacred Warrior, Beneath the Shadows will be a release you won't want to pass up. Additionally, the in-depth notes and explanations laid out cleverly on Retroactive's fold out digi-book format – compact and easy to read – add to the overall quality and durability of the release. [Retroactive] Jonathan Swank

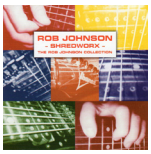
I BUILT THE CROSS
BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN MIND AND HEART
Despite continued predictions of its demise, metalcore seems to be popular still. Impending Doom fans will eat up I Built the Cross's debut, which showcases a bright young band bringing their technical brand of death to the metalcore masses. The opening narrative (lifted from *Kill Zone 2*?) and closing instrumental outro bookend the deathcore glory. The barks and growls don't make or break the band, except perhaps to hide some intelligent Christian lyrics. Cover art is nice, album name too long, but it is their technical prowess that makes this band memorable. Far from being formulaic, the metalcore is interspersed with speed metal riffs, heavy power metal grooves and other unexpected guitar sounds that keep each song sounding original. Not quite Becoming the Archetype, but an above average debut for IBTC. [Open Grave] Chris Gatto

SAINT
HELL BLADE
Before reviewing this, I listened through the previous releases to get a historical perspective. I feel this release captures the power and magic most of us felt with Time's End, and took it to new heights. The power throughout each song is top notch for this style, and production feels much better this time around. Hopefully being released on a larger label will get this heavier-than-ever metal monster into more hands; it fully deserves attention. [Retroactive] Jeff McCormack

SAINT
CRIME SCENE EARTH 2.0
Previously released independently on Richard Lynch's Armor Records – absent Josh Kramer on all but 3 tracks – CSE was not one of the stronger weapons in the Saint arsenal. But this new version, mostly remixed and remastered, and most importantly with Josh singing on all the songs is definitely an improvement. Collectors might want both versions, but for those interested in a more "true" and more sonically powerful Saint experience, 2.0 gets my vote. [Retroactive] Jonathan Swank

VENIA
VICTORY BY SURRENDER
Many symphonic metal bands boast female singers now, but thankfully, Veronica, Venia's blonde songstress, steers clear of operatic range. Her soft melodic vocals accent the music, while lacking the kind of edge that defines metal. Galloping power metal/ thrash riffs abound on this album. Keyboards appear in a few songs, although not overdone, and Veronica even plays the violin in a couple songs. Lyrics and subject matter are straightforward, with the majority of the album being in English and 3 songs in the band's native Finnish. In the final multi-part song "A Sigh of Redemption" vocals are traded verse by verse among the band and the listener gets a taste of what this band would sound like with harsher vocals (be they by male or female). Definite progress for Venia (not to be confused with the other Venia.) [Open Grave/NePlusUltra] Chris Gatto

NEPHESH
INTER ARMAS SILENT LEGES
This blistering black metal assault is the debut of Colombian natives Nephesh on Nokternal Hemisphere. The production is high quality and enhances the orchestral vibe of the album without the keyboards overwhelming the music. For this reason, some may draw comparisons to Dimmu Borgir, but further speed/ thrash/death influences flesh out the sound and make it quite approachable for those who may not be black metal fans. The cover art gives a cold, dark feel and lyrics are about half English, half Spanish (which many listeners may not notice). A real stand out for this genre – definitely worth your attention. [Nokternal Hemisphere] Chris Gatto



ROB JOHNSON
SHREDWORX
Anyone remember Magnitude Nine – the neoclassical/ progressive metal band from the late 90's fronted by the remarkable Corey Brown on vocals and this phenomenal player on lead guitar? M9 released 3 excellent CDs (two on Inside Out). Well, Rob has put together this collection of his solo work … and well, it sounds a lot like the kind of guitar virtuosity he displayed with M9. Chock full of technical brilliance, fans of this kind of instrumental stuff have much to be impressed by here. While I personally miss Rob's work with M9, it's great to hear that Rob is still honing his skills, perhaps awaiting that next band opportunity. [Shredguy Records] Jonathan Swank

GUARDIAN
FIRST WATCH – 20TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION
Before Guardian cruised the Miracle Mile with the Power of Love trying to catch a Bottle Rocket, a Buzz was started in Orange County. First Watch was the first full length release by this So Cal quartet. It sold 30,000 units it's first month. The re-mastering is handled by the incomparable J. Powell at Steinhaus. Bro, it sounds FABULOUS! Greater clarity and added punch in all the right places, it just makes it all sound so alive. The two cuts which appeared on the first Cal Metal appear here as well. Thanks Retroactive for this re-master. So just roll down the windows or throw the top down and CRUISE!!! The Son is out. [Retroactive] Keven Crothers

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THROWING DOWN THE GAUNTLET

By Steve Rowe

SMILE YOUR WAY THROUGH LIFE

One tremendous way to deal with the pain that often comes throughout our human existence is to have a joyful heart. Proverbs 17:22 says, "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine." One thing that has fascinated people who have seen me play over the years is that no matter how brutal the song is that I am playing I always smile on stage. Even more so since surviving cancer.

I remember when I was in hospital in '96, '97 & '98 often my wife Kate and I would watch comedy videos. Adam Sandler, Jim Carey, etc… Just silly humor that makes me laugh. Kate will tell you that even in the worst of pain I find the funny side of it all. I truly understand the truth that a happy heart is good like a medicine. Laughing releases endorphins and endorphins are positive body chemicals that bring health and well being.

I have just recorded the debut album by my solo rock band Wonrowe Vision. Being very up tempo in nature I knew I had to write a song called "Smile Your Way Through Life." There is nothing better than smiling through the pain of it all and there is nothing worse than people who recite their pains over and over to others. The quickest way for anyone to lose friends is to whine non-stop about the pain and suffering of life and how "unfair" it all is.

Can I encourage all of you to smile your way through life. Especially at school and at work. People will notice you have something special in your life if you can smile through both the good and not so good times. Circumstances should not dictate over our joy. The joy of the Lord is our strength!

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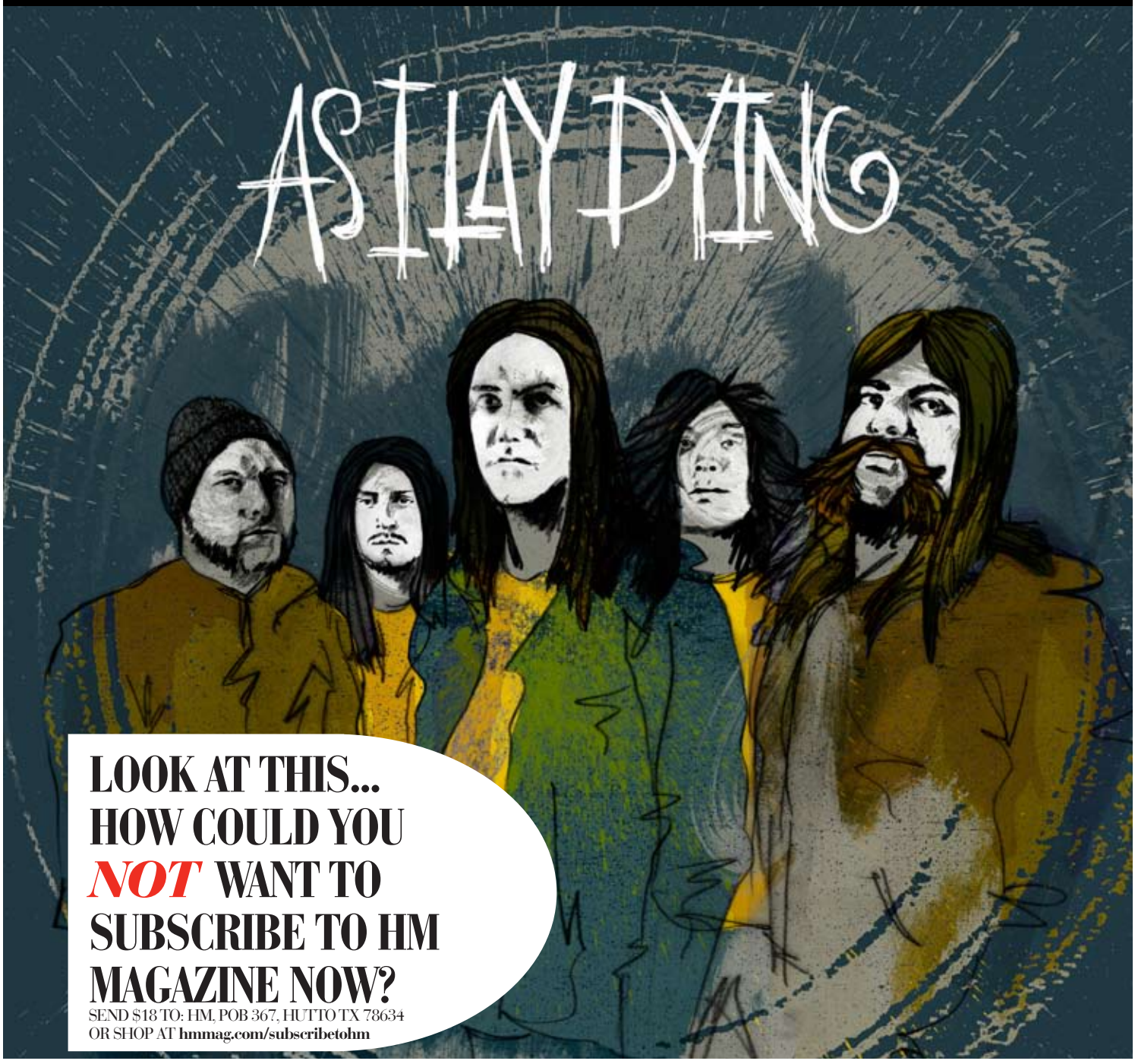

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A DIET OF METAL

Alright! You asked for it ... you begged for it. So here it is ... the new, envelope-less delivery version of Heaven's Metal Fanzine. What?! You're kidding, right? Okay, so I jest. What we have here is a cost-cutting measure. If you keep up with the music business, you know sales are down. If you keep up with the magazine/publication business, you know that ad sales are down. Our circulation numbers at Heaven's Metal Fanzine are slightly down (from over 700 to just slightly over 500). Something's gotta be done, so we're subtracting mailing envelopes from the fanzine (as you'll see with your mailing address being printed here on the back cover and mailed out this way). How can you help? Renew your subscription! Subscribe for a friend (or two)! Sponsor a prisoner subscription. One thing you might notice about *this* issue is that the *last* issue was called the December/January Issue #83, but this one is called April/May Issue #84. What happened to February and March? Well, those months were very cold (haha). What happened was a simple delay. Instead of fighting the calendar all year long in a futile game of "catch up," I've decided to simply change the months printed on this issue. You haven't missed any issues (note the issue # went from 83 to 84), it's just a title/labeling thing. Be on the lookout for the 25th Anniversary issue of HM coming out later this summer (#144). Even if you are not a fan of HM Magazine (not enough metal for ya), you'll want to get its 25th Anniversary / July August issue, because it'll do a lot of metal history reminiscing. Who doesn't love that?

Jesus lives ... and His love for you is real!

Doug Van Pelt

HEAVEN'S METAL FANZINE APRIL/MAY 2010 ISSUE #84

TABLE OF ELEMENTS

06 METAL TRACKS Njiqahdda, '09 Staff Picks, Believer, Tourniquet & more.

09 CONCERT REVIEW Edwin Lopez reviews Sacred Warrior in Puerto Rico.

10 ANTIDEMON Michael Larson talks with Batista from this world-touring and Bible-ministering extreme metal trio from Brazil.

12 GRAVE ROBBER Keven Crothers actually hangs out with this bunch of musical and social misfits (okay, the pun was intended...).

14 MIKE PHILLIPS Chris Beck gets the lowdown on this shredder.

18 ALBUM REVIEWS 16 of 'em.

21 COLUMN Steve Rowe sounds off.

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